

The American Veteran
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Segment 1

Host: Jim Benson

On this edition of The American Veteran: a visit to the women veterans wall of honor; we talk with VA and D-O-D social workers about returning soldiers; and as VA turns 75, we celebrate one of VA's most prominent physicians.

Hello, I'm Jim Benson.

This is "The American Veteran," a public affairs program produced by the Department Of Veterans Affairs.

Each month, we bring you stories about programs and services you, as a veteran have earned. Since the founding of this nation, women have made countless sacrifices and overcome tremendous odds to serve in our country's military.

As Nina Edwards reports, a new traveling exhibit focuses on personal stories from more than 200 female veterans who have made their mark on our nation's history.

JANET COOK:

"Terry, where are you?" (pointing to a large, class reunion-like photo)

"Me? I'm right there." "She's right there with Cor & Judy."

"I'm right there."

NINA EDWARDS:

They first met in October of 1997. Four bus loads of woman veterans from the Tennessee Valley region, coming to Washington, DC, for the dedication of a very special monument.

JANET COOK:

"We didn't all know one another, very few of us knew one another before this day, before this event.

NINA EDWARDS:

In front of thousands, the doors of the Women In Military Service For America Memorial, also known as "WIMSA," opened at Arlington National Cemetery.

MARY ROSS:

"This was actually the day I started thinking of myself as a veteran."

JANET COOK:

"It was a homecoming for women veterans. It was a healing opportunity for women veterans. It was a bonding opportunity.

MARY ROSS:

"I didn't know any of these people that were on the trip with us, but they are now my best friends - the best friends a person could ever have. I wouldn't trade a million dollars for this trip."

NINA EDWARDS:

With the bonds they created, the woman veterans knew they couldn't let this opportunity pass.

JANET COOK:

"We wanted to increase the visibility of women veterans in the VA medical center and we were looking for ways to do that. Out of that idea grew the Women Veterans Wall of Honor."

NINA EDWARDS:

After raising nine-thousand dollars, the ladies created their "Wall Of Honor." Not only as a tribute to women veterans, but also to tell the history of women in the military, featuring veterans from the Tennessee Valley region.

ANDI JOHNSTON:

(pointing to a display consisting of many photographs) "Where am I? Oh, here I am."

NINA EDWARDS:

Andi Johnston was in the Navy during the Cuban missile crisis, stationed in Florida.

MARY ROSS:

"I'm right there (pointing to the same display of photographs). And that was my home in Iraq."

NINA EDWARDS:

Retired Sergeant First Class Mary Ross spent 21 years in the Army and served in Iraq during the first Gulf War.

MARY ROSS:

"There are things that you do in the military that you cannot explain to someone who has not experienced it."

NINA EDWARDS:

Now, the "Wall Of Honor" is prominently displayed inside the "WIMSA" memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, sparking curiosity and memories.

JULIA-FAYE CLARK:

I enlisted in Idaho. I was only the second woman in our hometown who had ever enlisted in the service."

EDWARDS: "Army?"

CLARK: "Navy."

EDWARDS: "Oh good...glad...me too. She's Navy." (laughs)

NINA EDWARDS:

While the wall offers a sense of "sisterhood," it also provides an education about women -- the invisible veterans.

JANET COOK:

"It is very exciting to look back and see how far women have come and the things that we can do in the military.

NINA EDWARDS:

Steve Valley knows first hand the contributions of women in the military. as a First Sergeant in the Army Reserves, he supervised numerous women soldiers in the field.

STEVE VALLEY:

"People have got to realize that women have given just as much as men in times of war and peace."

NINA EDWARDS:

The dream of a "Wall Of Honor" came from one simple trip. Now, the wall comes back to the place where it all started.

MARYANN WOODWARD-SMITH:

"This is where it began for us. In Oct. of 1997, we were here for the dedication of this beautiful memorial and to be able to bring our Women Veterans Network Wall of Honor back here on display, it's just too wonderful for words."

NINA EDWARDS:

In their day, they were considered "pioneers." Now, these ladies have filled their shoes and continue clearing the way for the military women of the future.

JIM BENSON

The Women Veterans Wall Of Honor will be on display at Arlington National Cemetery through July 24th.

The American Veteran profiles V-A'S federal benefits – but there are also many benefits offered and funded by individual states.

Did you know in some states, certain veterans can go to college for free, get a bonus for serving in a war or be exempt from paying certain taxes?

Here are some of the other “little known benefits” you should know about.

Did you know in Alaska, veterans can get a one-time discount when they buy public land?

In Florida, if you’re a disabled veteran, and you can’t put money in the toll basket, you can get a special vehicle sticker so you don’t have to pay the toll.

Did you know in Illinois, honorably discharged veterans and their families get free admission to the state fair on Veterans Day?

And in New York, certain severely disabled veterans can register their car for free and get toll-free “E-Z Pass” thruway permits.

Did you know Ohio gives out free hunting, fishing and boating licenses to special categories of veterans?

And here’s a Texas-sized bonus: free admission to state parks for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities.

And did you know wartime veterans in Utah enjoy free use of state armories as meeting places?

Now you know!

For more information on veterans benefits -- state-by-state -- visit the National Association Of State Directors Of Veterans Affairs’ Web site, which is WWW DOT NASDVA DOT COM.

to find federal benefits, visit the Department Of Veterans Affairs Web site at VA-DOT-GOV.

When we return: A visit to a transitional house for women veterans in Lyons, New Jersey.

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